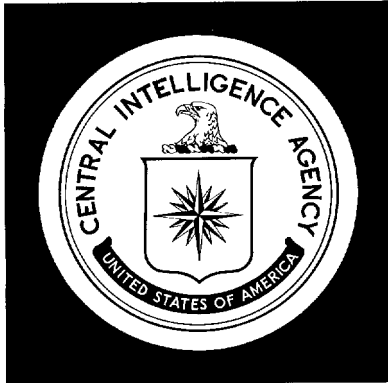


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UN - MIDDLE EAST: Egypt's Foreign Minister Riad kicked off the Middle East debate in the UN yesterday with a moderate presentation of well-known Egyptian views.

Riad's restrained exposition of the Arab case confirms earlier indications that the Egyptians, for the moment, have in mind a relatively temperate resolution which could gain broad international support. While discussing Cairo's strategy at the UN with US officials this week, Riad made a strong pitch for US support in the world body. He said that Cairo's minimum substantive demands are an endorsement of the 1967 Security Council Resolution 242, reactivation of the Jarring mission as well as a response by Tel Aviv to Jarring's memorandum of last February, and a provision barring Israel from changing the status of the occupied territories.

The Egyptians appear less confident of solid African support for a harsh resolution calling for sanctions against Israel, and now seem intent on isolating Tel Aviv by gaining an overwhelming vote for a non-controversial statement of their position. They probably calculate that if they fail to gain US support, they could submit a more stringently worded resolution, placing the onus on Washington. In their view, such a resolution would have a better-than-even chance for passage.

Probably with Israeli encouragement, Costa Rica has drafted for the Latin American group at the UN an alternative text to the one the Egyptians have in mind. This draft urges a reactivation of the Jarring mission, but does not call for an Israeli response to the envoy's February memorandum. It also calls for direct negotiations between the parties and advocates the establishment of "well-defined, recognized boundaries" in a peace settlement, two concepts the Israelis strongly prefer. The existence of the two texts should lead to considerable back-stage negotiations during the debate, which may last for a week to ten days.

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The UN secretariat hopes to put Jarring back in business soon and is stressing that Israel has an option that, if played, could improve the diplomatic climate for Tel Aviv's position.

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The US Mission at the UN believes that Jarring would regard any response, either oral or written, as a possible break in the impasse of several months standing.

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ICELAND: In his statement at the NATO ministerial meeting next week, Foreign Minister Agustsson is expected to introduce a watered-down version of his government's tough stand against the US military presence in Iceland.

According to Iceland's permanent representative in Brussels, Agustsson will also discuss the statement with Secretary Rogers when he visits Reykjavik, presumably sometime next week, en route to the NATO meeting. The Icelandic representative said the statement would be strictly informational and not intended to initiate a formal dialogue with NATO on the base issue at this meeting.

The statement will probably be moderate, for the Icelandic Government has shown signs of backing away from its vow to bring about the withdrawal during its term of office. At the opening of the UN General Assembly in September, Agustsson asked Secretary Rogers to present evidence to support the retention of a US presence. In late October, the foreign minister was given a formal briefing on base activities and a tour of some of the facilities. Agustsson told the parliament on 23 November that other NATO members must convince Iceland that the defense force is still necessary.

The most recent development favoring retention of the force was a statement on 1 December by three of Agustsson's Progressive Party colleagues in the parliament, who declared their opposition to the government's initial stand. The defection of these three denies the ruling coalition a majority on the base question, assuming that the opposition votes as a block in favor of the US presence.

The Communist-dominated Labor Alliance, also a member of the government coalition, apparently remains wedded to an outright withdrawal. This adds to strains on the coalition's unity, which is already being tested by differences over wage policy. The upshot is that the government will try to put off the Defense Force issue as long as possible.

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